

WILLIAM A. LITTLE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
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INTERVIEWERS: WILLIAM LITTLE

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[00:00:00] **TYREE:** ...got directed at me, and the final coup in the CCA [Central Contractors Association] was then finally directed at me. That came about—see, my leadership got established—me and the people that I was involved with, we were established as the leadership from the point of the confrontation in Lem's office. And so then we went ahead and started doing the regular day-to-day CCA stuff. We were able to get some money from the Seattle Model Cities program to hire full-time staff, to remodel the building where the Legal Services Center is now into office space for the Central Contractors Association, and we started doing business. Harley Bird was the director of the Central Contractors Association, the business manager. We started on day-to-day work and trying to get jobs for—

[BREAK IN RECORDING OF INTERVIEW]

So we started to try—I mean, Harley was trying to get jobs for contractors, to get bonds for contractors, and just provide the kinds of services the Association was set up to provide for contractors. At the same time, a great deal of our work went into making sure that the apprentices who had been placed on those jobs as a result of the demonstrations and stuff were being treated equally and fairly and stuff. A great deal of our time went into that. We were involved in the negotiations with different elements inside the construction industry on those issues.

Three months later, there was opportunism going on inside the Association, what I considered opportunism, anyway. There were those contractors, who I was talking about earlier, who were not particularly the trade people, who became employers. But they were like people who were trying to make money, a fast buck in the construction trades and stuff, who also saw the significance of the leadership of the Association. And so there was a struggle for that. There was one particular contractor who was constantly going bankrupt and filing bankruptcy and starting up new companies, L.B. Curry. He united with these other dissident elements, because there was certainly disagreement about how we were approaching it and the amount of militancy we were approaching it with. But we had struck a balance with the other leadership elements in the Black community. Like the Model Cities money, for example, we were able to get that. And we had developed a relationship with Walter Hundley and the leadership in the Model Cities. But at the same, these guys were like, trying to get their share of it. The contractors and the fierce competition, we were trying to keep them honest.

Well, we had ninety thousand dollars, and five thousand dollars of that money would go—it was a very small amount of money for the kind of thing we were talking about—would go to cover bonds, small capital for purchasing certain kinds of tools or something for the employers. The rest of the money would go like for staff and the office and stuff like that. So this guy needed to pay for a truck, Curry did, he had his truck repossessed, and he wanted to get the money to pay for it. We had established a procedure that members of the Board of Directors could not be recipients of this money. Not that we didn't need it, but the opinion was that they could use their influence through the Association to get money from the traditional lending sources, whereas the people in the Association who were not members of the Board of Directors, who the Association could give the money to directly, loan the money to directly.

And the whole thing came to a head, when Curry was able to organize these other guys to come in and demand that he be given a loan to get his trucks out of hock. I was steadfast in my disapproval of Curry getting any money. And finally, he brought in these guys in one day to the meeting and insisted that we give him the money. I refused to give in, and they told me I couldn't leave the building unless I gave him a signed check. And I said, "No, I'm not going to sign the check." And so I said "I'm going to leave, I ain't going to sign the check, I'm leaving." So one of the guys hit me over the head with a chair and pulled a gun out on Harley and Takisaki. That was a step beyond where I was willing to go. So I told them, "Fuck it," and of course, I left. They didn't ask me to sign the check no more, but they had the organization at that point.

The next morning, I got a telegram in the mail from the Board of Directors of the contractors asking me to resign. They later rescinded that, but as far as I was concerned, it was finished. Curry was one of the members of the Board of Directors, and Ben McAdoo was one of the members of the Board of Directors. I can't remember whether Talbot was a member of the Board of Directors. I don't know who all they were. But anyway, my position was that they are right, and I should resign, so I did.

I'm getting along with all of them today. I've got a relationship with each and every one of them, and they offered me the job, but I told them that it wasn't something I wanted to do, and it still isn't. I recognize that they

were right, that there was a division there between us and the workers. So that was the end of that, the end of my relationship with the CCA.

[00:07:21] **WILLIAM:** Okay, what transpired in the interim before you started the UCWA [United Construction Workers Association]?

[00:07:30] **TYREE:** Before like people organized the UCWA, there was a period of about—nothing transpired. There was about a period of two, three months, about three months that I didn't do anything. I was living with my father at the time when that happened, and I left him about about a week, a month or so afterward. So I just didn't do anything between March, April, and May.

Meanwhile, I think I was talking about before, the [American Friends] Service Committee came to me, and they'd been talking to me all along about a workers association, and I agreed to help them raise the money for it. And so along about April I guess, we had raised ten thousand dollars or so from local foundations and stuff, I can't remember now where all the money came from. Some came from the Service Committee itself. They wanted me to like go to work for them after I had left the CCA and my father, but I'd had enough of like—in my opinion, it was civil rights work. So I said no, I didn't want to do that. And I started looking for some other kind of work. I was offered a job by a group that was made up of different denominations of different churches—

[00:09:02] **WILLIAM:** Ecumenical Council?

[00:09:02] **TYREE:** No, no. Project Equality. It was made up of community people and liberals. I was going to take the job, but I had an attitude of like how the work got done. And the way that the thing was set up was supposed to be [if] the company was not an Equal Opportunity Employer, then the church would not do business with them. The church would use its influence in institutions like, say, Providence Hospital or Seattle University to buy paper, and if Crown Zellerbach was not an Equal Opportunity Employer, they would then send me to talk to Crown Zellerbach. And you should compile information and go to Crown, and say, "Look, this is the situation, they want you to hire these people or something, or the church don't want to do any business with you." And I thought that was alright, at the time. But then they set up an appointment with me to talk to the national director. He came out here from Chicago. We met in his hotel room at the Washington Plaza Hotel, and I told him how I saw the work being done. He told me that he thought that I had the spirit, but that the church would not go along with that kind of work, that it was a bit too militant to try. Because I said that I thought they should organize boycotts against those employers that discriminated, and that friendly persuasion would not convince them not to discriminate. And as a result of that, I just turned the job down when he gave me his opinion about what their response would be.

But my little girl was born on the 23rd of June, and I was unemployed. The interview was the same day that she was born, the day I turned it down, and I decided that afternoon to take the job for the Service Committee to try to organize the workers group.

[00:11:12] **WILLIAM:** That was the 24th of June, 1974?

[00:11:20] **TYREE:** 23rd, 1970. And I told you, we then brought those workers together who had been involved with the stuff from the beginning and who testified in the trials and the lawsuit and all that. And on July 15th, that was the beginning of UCWA.

[00:11:49] **WILLIAM:** Do you have any information going back to that period, that initial start, in the inception of the organization?

[00:11:57] **TYREE:** Any information?

[00:11:59] **WILLIAM:** Any written stuff?

[00:11:59] **TYREE:** Oh yeah, there's a paper called The Issue Whose Time Has Come.

[00:12:03] **WILLIAM:** Oh yeah, I got that.

[00:12:04] **TYREE:** And there's probably, like, records around here, letters that went out, maybe, in the files. You might sometime want to sit down and go through the files and just read some old letters and stuff, but that's the kind of information that's available.

[Tyree and William talk about information sources]

[BREAK IN RECORDING OF INTERVIEW]

[00:12:29] **WILLIAM:** ...the one you were probably telling me about.

[00:12:37] **TYREE:** Yeah, this was [inaudible]. This was around January.

[00:12:43] **WILLIAM:** '71?

[00:12:47] **TYREE:** '70. '69 and '70 we're talking about. We had a meeting one night, and there was a problem with alcohol in the meetings, and this was purely one of those situations that had nothing to do with political factions—or well, I guess it did, but it wasn't that important. What had happened really was that [Milton] Norwood and Milton Dixon and all the guys were in the meeting and sitting around—I mean, both Milton Norwood and Dixon was standing near the rear of the room, and Takisaki who was always like being good to everybody, people could always borrow money—I mean, historically folks have gone to him and borrowed money, and historically, he's an [?almsman?], and he would loan money to the people's group, to the opportunist group, and they could depend on him to borrow tools and do work for them. There might be a general contractor who needs some work done in a specific area, Takisaki would come and do work with his crew and stuff. He was basically one of the few contractors that had resources and the necessary management skills to get his work completed and stuff. As a result, he had some money. So he created some allegiances across the lines. He was basically more united with, say, McAdoo, and me, and Harley, and those people. But he also had good friends with other guys because of the money.

And there was a group of contractors who were like the silent majority, who I talked about earlier. One of the silent majority group who also had alcohol problems, too, was Carl Wiley. And Carl Wiley was sitting there in the meeting, and I was in front of the room, chairing the meeting. And we were talking about some issue, and Carl Wiley jumped up and said something about, "To hell with them other minorities," you know—no, "There were certain people ripping off the community," and he called the real estate broker, [?Harcastle?], he's a white real estate broker, and he called Jim Takisaki a Japanese contractor. So Takisaki got disallegiance from the groups, people didn't want—so these guys, Milton Dixon says something about Takisaki, something about Takisaki, you know, he's alright, he's a good guy, don't say anything about him no more. He'd been drinking too, but Carl had been drinking and was pretty drunk.

So then we went on, we were discussing something, and Carl jumped up and said something about Takisaki again. And so Milton came from the back of the room and punched Carl Wiley on the side of the head. In the process of hitting Carl Wiley, Milton's gun fell out on the floor, and went off and shot him in the arm. I'm just going to go back and say this: they're always shooting themselves, there was another incident where [laughs] Leon Ward dropped his gun and shot himself in the foot, or something. So this was about the second or third incident of them shooting themselves. But the funny part about it was, the room was packed with contractors, I mean basically only there were contractors that night, contractors and their boys.

So people started to like run, split out the door. Milton Norwood didn't know what had happened. Milton yelled, "Oh, I'm hit." All we heard was a gun go off, and then Milton grabbed his arm and said, "I'm hit." So Milton Norwood, who was Milton's friend, pulled his gun out, I mean, he was fast as lightning, I swear, he was like a wild Westerner. He said, "Don't nobody move." And I swear, like three folks had already ran out the door, they was running that fast. But he scared everybody, stopped them, nobody else left. [laughs]

And so Lem, and McAdoo, and Harley, and me and somebody else grabbed Norwood, I mean Milton, and sat him down and looked at what had happened. And then I tried to deal with people in the room like, "Let's cool this down, he dropped his gun on the floor and it went off and shot him in the arm, it's gonna be alright, we'll get him to the hospital and stuff." So we got him to the hospital and got the bullet taken out, and got it that the accident, that his gun fell out of his holster and shot him in the arm. Cause he was on parole, we didn't want to get him in trouble and thrown into jail and stuff.

But in the meanwhile, there was another element developing out of the whole thing, cause Norwood, he'd never stay cool, put his gun away and stuff. Carl Wiley, the guy who gets hit by Milton, then decides to call the police. So we said, "Look Carl, he hit you, but he got the worse end of the deal, he got shot." But he was drunk. "Nobody hits me, I got my pride." So we were trying to like, "Look man, we don't need to have the white folks down on us with this shit, so let's cool it. You got your money's worth out of the deal, he hit you, he shouldn't have hit you, his gun fell on the floor and shot him in the arm, and now everybody's even. He's got a problem, and you don't need to be calling the police and stuff." So we went down and finished getting him drunk at the Cottage. You know where the Cottage is on Madison [Street]? We went down there and wine and dined the rest of the night.

And the next day, I was going to St. Louis and by the time I left in the evening, it was in the evening paper. I was on the plane reading about the Central Contractors shoot-out at the meeting. So Carl Wiley, the next morning went and got the police, his ego got in the way. So those are the three times when there was shooting and stuff going on. You know Milton is dead?

[00:19:16] **WILLIAM:** Milton Norwood is dead?

[00:19:17] **TYREE:** Dixon. I found out that his woman shot him, too.

[00:19:23] **WILLIAM:** But Milton Norwood's the one that called the police on Wiley?

[00:19:28] **TYREE:** No, no, Carl Wiley called the police on Milton Dixon. Milton Norwood was the guy at the back of the room who pulled the gun out real fast and said, "Don't nobody move."

[00:19:39] **WILLIAM:** That Milton was Norwood?

[00:19:42] **TYREE:** Norwood, yeah. As somebody, they'll tell you about the indecent. See, Milton was his friend, the one who's dead, they was close friends. That was like Carl Wiley's only scene in the whole scenario. [laughs] Anyways, I don't know where we are.

[BREAK IN RECORDING OF INTERVIEW]

[00:20:19] **TYREE:** In the spring of '70, I mean in the summer of '70, we started the job closures all over again. This time it was because they hadn't implemented what we'd won, they had not implemented the court's order. So the job closures all started up again.

[BREAK IN RECORDING OF INTERVIEW]

[00:20:43] **WILLIAM:** So like the job closures started around [interruption] around the fact that the court's order had not been implemented?

[00:20:51] **TYREE:** And so people—then these workers started closing the jobs down. The GroupHealth project was one of the jobs, the Safeco building in the U District was one of the jobs, the Financial Center building downtown on 4th Avenue was also one of the jobs. About the time that it started to build up steam again, as it had the past fall, the CCA was with the being called back in, calling everybody back in and saying, "I've already litigated this case and I want it implemented." So that took the steam, the straight steam out of it, and then folks started to—I've talked about it before, about how we got started dispatching guys out to jobs vis-a-vis the employers' association, that's how that whole thing was dealt with that year.

Anyway, so we did the day-to-day work of the CCA for like a year—I mean the UCWA, for a year. And about year later, I left and went to Denver and stayed over there about seven months and came back to Seattle in the spring of '72.

[00:22:29] **WILLIAM:** Who took over, Jefferson took over while you were gone?

[00:22:36] **TYREE:** Milton, yeah, Milton Jefferson. The staff at UCWA was Harley Bird, Milton Jefferson, and a secretary, [?Gena Pope?], and a guy named Julius [?Pinchback?]. I came back here in the spring of '72. But basically, what went on was day-to-day taking care of those problems of those workers on those jobs. The guys who had a strong interest in the jobs and the guys who worked regularly stayed in, and the guys who didn't dropped out. And some of the guys didn't work regularly because they didn't show up. Others didn't work regularly because there was like, some of the trades they fought it, they fought very hard.

We had an incident this past week where the Ironworkers would not accept some of the Black workers on the job. On Monday they refused to take some of the Black guys who were dispatched, for no reason. On Tuesday, they fired some of the guys who had been hired the day before for no reason. On Wednesday, one white guy came in drunk and started calling one of the Black ironworkers a Nigger on the job, and that's been going on for five years and is still going on today. And so a lot of that caused guys to get run off jobs. And the union was not taking in the people they were supposed to take in, in the amounts they were supposed to take them in, and so the numbers were way down in '72. When they should have been over two hundred, there were more like forty, and those forty were only there because of the kinds of perseverance that went on on the part of UCWA to keep them there.

The next time we talk, we can talk about the role of the COAC [Court Order Advisory Committee]. I wrote about them in the paper, The Buffalo Soldier. And that might make some sense. If you read that, we can talk

specifically about what kind of role the COAC played. They then became the organ that the man set up to control what we would have taken control over in the absence of that organ. It was very significant. It still functions that way, however we believe to like to unite with the staff to some extent, so that we have much more involvement in it. But it was definitely an alternative kind of organization that was set up by the man to take the steam out of the UCWA.

I didn't really talk about the times that we were in the street and skipped over the times like it was very serious day-to-day work that went on. I mean, Harley, you know Harley Bird, was probably one of the most qualified people, "qualified people" around, and when I say around, I mean like in this country, who understands the EEO [Equal Employment Opportunity] laws—